

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 184 AN ACT EXTENDING THROUGH NOVEMBER 8, 2022,  
SEVERAL CHANGES REGARDING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 AND  
CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT**

**AND**

**HB 5262 AN ACT REVISING CERTAIN ABSENTEE VOTING ELIGIBILITY STATUTES**

Honorable members of the GAE committee,

My name is Cindy Dubuque-Gallo, and I am a resident of Hartford. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 184 and HB 5262. These bills are critical to ensuring voter suffrage in Connecticut.

The fact that Connecticut is not an early voting state, unlike 38 others in the nation, makes us one of the most voting restrictive states in the country. However, we can do better by extending eligibility for absentee ballot voting to ensure that everyone who is legally eligible is able to exercise their right to vote.

In 2020, I acted as a roving poll monitor to ensure that voters were not experiencing undue burdens to voting. During my shift I witnessed an exceptionally long line at Grace Lutheran Church on Woodland Street in Hartford, CT. Students from the UCONN School of Social Work had set up a table and were providing hot drinks and food to those waiting in line. I found out that several had been waiting for over two hours to vote. This circumstance unfortunately is not unusual for communities of color and those who live in urban settings. According to a data from the 2018 election, the Brennan Center for Justice (2020) found that “Latino and Black voters were more likely than white voters to report particularly long wait times, and they waited longer generally” (p. 4). Though two years later, the problem appeared to remain. Upon further investigation, I found out that only one voting record book had been provided at the site and so only one person could be checked in at a time. If there were any problems with the person’s ID or they were at the location, this would stall the check in process, leaving those outside waiting in the cold. I began to see people losing hope and leaving. Some individuals had to get to work. Others just gave up. Despite getting assistance from State Representative Matt Ritter who saw what was happening that day, we were told that nothing could be done. The Registrar of Voters in Hartford initially was not able to rectify the situation.

After making multiple attempts to rectify the situation with City Hall and the Registrar of Voters, I reached out to my colleagues, and we organized a campaign to call State Election Enforcement. Five of us had witnessed the problem at the Woodland Street polling place and filed complaints citing voter suppression. There was no reason why the polling place should have only one book to check in voters and not enough staff to meet the needs of the voters. Shortly after our calls more help arrived at the polling place and voters were able to cast their ballots. It should not have taken five phone calls to State Election Enforcement to make sure that Hartford voters could exercise their right to vote. Voters do not need systemic unpreparedness in addition to all the other barriers of voting to make things more challenging.

Many voters have limitations that make voting difficult. These can include taking care of a sick loved one, having a personal illness or disability, having to work out of town, or lacking access to transportation. Extending who can vote absentee and planning ahead for whatever unexpected variant of COVID that might come our way ensures that we provided every eligible voter the opportunity to cast their vote safely and legally. While some might argue that increasing electoral resources to address the issue that I witnessed in Hartford would solve the problem, the Brennan Center report notes that “allocating equal resources among counties and precincts is not sufficient to produce equal wait times for voters, particularly those of color and of lower incomes” (2020, p. 4). Therefore, if we believe in racial equity, voter enfranchisement and democracy, we must also live by our belief by making voting easy and accessible to all who are qualified to vote. I urge you to remove barriers to voting by extending the absentee ballot and by voting yes to SB 184 and HB 5262.

#### Reference:

Klain, H., Morris, K., Feldman, M., and Ayala, R. (2020). Waiting to vote: Racial disparities in election day experiences. Brennan Center for Justice. New York.  
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/waiting-vote>